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Innovation, Entrepreneurship and
Information Systems

RESEARCH
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EMPOWERING CHANGEMAKERS FOR A BETTER SOCIETY

‘The Diverse Flows of Precarity: Exploring the Enmeshing Pathways of MTurk Workers’

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ABSTRACT

Along the rise and increasing legitimation of the gig economy, this paper investigates the dynamics of social diversity and precarity in algorithmic-based forms of organization of work, through an empirical study of the case of Amazon Mechanical Turk. Specifically, we make a case for going beyond simply depicting workers of such platforms either as autonomous entrepreneurs or exploited victims. Instead, by drawing from the work of social anthropologist Tim Ingold, we open the black box of MTurk to accommodate the diverse ways in which subjection (Butler, 1997) to this platform allows workers already living on diverse socio-economic paths to navigate differential ebbs and flows of precarity. Specifically, we show how as different storylines mesh together they create or disrupt different conditions of possibility for (trans)formative action and becoming along the diverse lives of MTurk workers. We then tease out the mechanisms that explain the dynamics of diversity and precarity through this emergent and multiple process. We finally discuss the implications of our approach for research and policy interested in issues of diversity and precarity.

Keywords: Amazon Mechanical Turk, gig economy, precarity, diversity, subject ontology, flow, storylines, correspondence, meshwork, Ingold